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## CONNECTICUT STATE POLICE UNION

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Good afternoon, Senator Osten, Representative Tercyak, Senator Markley, Representative Smith and Distinguished Members of the Labor and Public Employees Committee.

My name is Andrew Matthews, and I am the President of the Connecticut State Police Union. Our Union represents approximately 1,041 State Troopers, Sergeants and Master Sergeants. We appreciate the opportunity to speak before you today. We are here to speak in FAVOR of:

### PROPOSED BILL NO. 823

#### "An Act Concerning Severe Mental Or Emotional Impairment And Workers' Compensation Coverage"

The Connecticut State Police Union membership takes great pride in protecting all Connecticut citizens and visitors, however many times it comes at a significant personal sacrifice. Often, Police Officers, Fireman/Firewomen, EMS personnel and now as a result of Newtown, even school teachers have been forced to witness alarming scenes that will forever live in their minds. Together, we not only have a responsibility to relieve any physical and/or financial distress an employee experiences as a result of workplace violence, but we must also prevent any abuses of these protections. The statute already excludes certain types of mental or emotional impairments resulting from personnel actions, including but not limited to transfers, promotions, demotions and/or terminations.

Currently, under CGS: 31-275(16)(B)(ii) it only covers a mental or emotional impairment if it arises from a physical or occupational disease; when a police officer uses deadly force or subjected to deadly force in the line of duty, regardless if the officer is physically injured. Unfortunately, the current statute does not protect those employees that are mentally or emotionally injured as a result of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). The State Police Union believes that any injury arising out of and in the course of our employment should be covered by Workman's compensation benefits. These injuries include, but are not limited to, physical injuries and any mental or emotional injury where the predominant contributing cause of such disability is an event or events occurring as a result of our employment. These benefits concerning mental health injuries would be treated the same as a traditional claim and would require a diagnosis by a licensed and board certified mental health professional.


Post-traumatic stress disorder has the potential to occur after exposure to critical incidents or traumatic/shocking events. There is little doubt that there are employees who are suffering, will continue to suffer, or will suffer from PTSD in the future as a result of the traumatic workplace events. This legislation is not only fair, but provides limited circumstances to qualify and it reduces the potential for abuse. As first responders we not only live with the daily stress of potentially losing our own lives, but we may witness the death, violence and trauma to members of the public. Consequently, Police, Fire and EMS have an increased risk of PTSD because of the repeated exposure to these incidents, which could potentially interfere with our ability to perform our duties. This legislation sends a clear message of support from our Connecticut legislators and it would be the first step in protecting against employees not being cared for and will ensure that they receive the proper treatment they need and deserve.

As an example, recently the Connecticut State Police responded to Newtown with unwavering courage, leadership, strength and professionalism. State Troopers (both on and off duty) arrived on scene as this cowardly and unconscionable act of violence was actively occurring. Within a short period of time, there were over 100 Troopers on scene caring for the survivors, the families of the students, the Newtown community and to ensure the proper respect and care was provided to all concerned. Whether it was one of the initial responding Troopers, a member of our Emergency Services Unit, a liaison Trooper assigned to the families of the victims, or a Major Crime Unit Detective assigned to conduct the investigation and/or process the scene, we are extremely proud of their actions. However, this tragedy was life changing for so many of them and some are visibly wounded emotionally and in need of help.

Newtown was of such unspeakable dimensions, it has forced us to respond in a powerful and untraditional way to ensure we minimize the emotional harm of employees into the future. Some first responders that suffer from PTSD may have nightmares or may even repeatedly relive the event in their mind. The results of these experiences are directly linked to the performance of our duties and any "injury" either physical or mental, should be protected by state statute. We need to make sure employees don't suffer physically, mentally or financially as a result of being forced to witness workplace violence or deadly situations while fulfilling their duties. In order to ensure that first responders are able to effectively respond and provide public safety, we need our legislative leaders to make sure when we are in need of assistance, it will be provided without penalty.

Based on the foregoing, we respectfully request this Committee to pass this legislation.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Andrew Matthews", is written over a horizontal line.

Andrew N. Matthews, Esq.  
President - Connecticut State Police Union